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RICHMOND DURING THE WAR OF 1812.

(CONTINUED.)

LETTERS OF DR. THOMAS MASSIE.

(From the Massie Papers, Virginia Historical Society Collection.)

[The letters from which extracts are here printed were written in 1813 and 1814, by Dr. Thomas Massie, then a resident of Richmond, to his father Major Thomas Massie, of Nelson county. With the exception of the parts quoted the letters relate entirely to family affairs and personal business matters of no moment. While but little actual war news is contained, the letters give an idea of business conditions in Richmond at a time when there was no enemy actually threatening the city; but when the coast was closely blockaded. Dr. Massie though doing his duty faithfully as assistant surgeon in the Militia, was evidently strongly opposed to the war, and we find in his letters nothing of the enthusiasm and determination which the threat of invasion appears to have generally called forth. He was afterwards a member of the Legislature and the Convention of 1829-30. He married Lucy Waller, of Williamsburg, and left issue.]

1813.

FEB. 6. Prices current: flour \$10; wheat 12sh.; tobacco from \$4 to \$7. I have applied to Burns respecting what William wishes to learn, but he says his engagements are already so numerous that he cannot undertake more. There is another teacher here named Lynch whose qualifications I wish to enquire into before I speak to him. This morning an express arrived from Norfolk stating that eight British ships of war were within a few miles of Norfolk, and it was apprehended that they would bombard the town. The cavalry and volunteer companies of this place are now on the Capitol Square to receive marching orders. An order for three thousand militia has been issued, to march to Norfolk without delay.

MARCH 13. Your flour has been stored ever since the price* has fallen to its present state—the buyers are at present unwilling to give \$7.00. The Russian mediation by offering the hope of peace has had some influence on the price of colonial produce, particularly sugar. In the meantime the British force in the Chesapeake, by late reinforcements, amounts to about thirty armed ships.

MARCH 26. We are tantalized here with the hope of an armistice as a prelude to peace. Whether peace will be the result of the armistice, if agreed on, or whether an armistice will take place, no man here, I believe, will venture to say. The opinion of the men of best sense here is that so long as our government commands the means of war, no peace is to be expected. And that little is to be hoped for except from our inability to procure money, or a refractory spirit in Congress. For the last two weeks the militia of Richmond and of the neighbouring counties have been placed in actual service. Every other day the 19th Reg^t, to which I am attached, has been kept eight hours on the parade. This sort of duty to people of the country, who are now preparing to plant corn, is intolerable, and has excited much murmuring.

P. S. We are informed that the British force in the Chesapeake is Augmented by the arrival of Ad^l Warren. We have little apprehension of hostilities reaching this place. The 19th Reg^t was dismissed from service to-day.

APRIL 6th. There is a rumor that Gallatin is to go to Russia after he has negotiated the loan voted by the last Congress. The merchants of Philadelphia, I was yesterday told by Mr. Polard, had agreed to take the balance of the loan at 25 P^r Cent. discount. It appears from the Enquirer of to-day that Gallatin is going there to negotiate the loan.

Tobacco has latterly sold here on better terms than for the last twelve months. It is purchased, I suppose, to be shipped

* War-time prices are so often quoted in these letters, that for the purpose of comparison, some prices just before the war are given. A Richmond price-current in the *Argus*, January, 1811, gives the following: wheat (new), \$1.50; flour (superfine), \$9.75; flour (fine), \$8.50; bacon, 13 cents; whiskey, 60 cents.

the moment there is an opportunity, as tobacco sells very high now in England and the stock they had before the war is very much diminished. I wish I could give you any satisfactory accounts of the flour market. No change has lately taken place. There is an enormous quantity of flour stored here, and unless the blockade is raised, immense losses will be sustained by many of the dealers in flour.

APRIL 22d. I will endeavor to procure as much gold for you as I can get. Some time ago I applied at the Bank of Virginia to know how much American gold I could get there. They agreed as a favor, to let me have \$200 in Eagles. The banks* have absorbed almost all the gold in circulation, and are very reluctant to part from it. I will procure the assistance of some of the merchants, by whose means I may procure a larger sum than I could otherwise get.

MAY 29th. Robertson informed me that he sold fifty barrels of your flour this morning for five dollars $\frac{2}{3}$ barrel, and has some expectation of selling five hundred more for the same price. He says it is worth a dollar more $\frac{2}{3}$ Barrel than any other flour in the market.

JULY 2d. I arrived here on the third day after I left you. I found the inhabitants of this place in a state of considerable alarm in consequence of the arrival of a British land force in the Chesapeake. Since that period an action has been fought at Hampton, where 440 militia are stated to have behaved well and to have killed upwards of 200 of the British [an error in number]. The force that made the attack has been estimated at from 2,000 to 2,500 men. On Wednesday last an express arrived here stating that a part of the British force had arrived at Sandy point. The Bells were rung, the alarm guns fired, and the town thrown into a state of great consternation. Some of the Enemy's small vessels are still proceeding up the river, but the most rational supposition is, I think, that they are in search of fresh provisions. The deserters say they have from four to five thousand men on board their fleet. At present we are here under martial law, the militia of the town parades morning and

* The Bank of Virginia, chartered January 30, 1804, and the Farmers Bank, February 13, 1812.

evening, and nothing else is done. The militia are coming in from the neighbouring counties, among whom are many well mounted cavalry. There are, I think, good grounds for believing that their force has been exaggerated, as an American pilot who was aboard the admiral's ship when Hampton was attacked states that the ships were very much stripped for that purpose, not more than fifty men being left on board the admiral's ship, and the number taken from the others was proportionate. The lucrative part of the practice of medicine is at an end here for the present; as the men bearing arms are put upon the military establishment, they are attended by the medical department of the Regiments. As a mate to the Reg^t, I have two hours every day for the purpose of prescribing for the sick.

JULY 17th. We are here at present in perfect quiet; nearly the whole of the Enemy's force has left Hampton roads; the greater part has gone up the bay. Yesterday a troop of horse from Orange, stationed here, were ordered to March to Fredericksburg in consequence of the appearance of the lighter vessels of the British fleet in the Rappahannock. Report said they were not far from Fredericksburg. Nothing is doing here now; the price of produce is scarcely talked of. The prospect of peace appears to be as distant as ever. We have had some intensely hot weather here lately. The thermometer at Capt. Macon's stood one day at 99° F. The same day in New Kent it stood 101. Lucy and Sarah are staying at Capt. Macon's, where they will remain, I expect, until the measles and Hooping cough disappear from this place. A great many of the inhabitants of Richmond that could leave home have gone from the town, many to the Springs.

AUGUST 14. Some speculators came into the Tobacco market a few days ago, and purchased to a considerable amount at \$6.50 for prime Tobacco. Flour may be said to be worth nothing.

AUG. 24. A considerable portion of the militia collected for the defence of this quarter of the country have been dismissed by the State Executive. I do not know how many are at present embodied. Their presence in this neighborhood has rendered articles of subsistence scarcer and dearer than they were ever known here before, particularly articles of food for horses. Sheaf oats have sold from 7th 6^d to 9th 3^d hundred weight.

SEPT. 3d. Liverpool salt of the best quality sells for nine dollars the sack of five bushels. Common salt sells for about nine shillings £ bushel. Tobacco has lately taken a rapid rise in this market, it ranges from two to seven dollars and is in demand.

SEPT. 15. We have heard nothing here lately of an agreeable nature except that some sugar is on its way here from the coast of North Carolina, and a reduction in the price of that article has taken place from thirty to twenty-four dollars £ Cwt. Some stress appears to be laid upon the difficulty and danger of that coast, and a hope is entertained that the British fleet will not be enabled effectually to prevent an intercourse between the inlets of North Carolina and the Ocean. The late rise in the price of Tobacco here renders me anxious to know what prospect Hambleton has of raising a crop—wheat is worth from 4^s 6^d to five shillings £ bushel here. New flour of fine quality retails at \$3.50 £ Cwt. and no doubt much might be purchased for less. The events of the ensuing winter must determine the price of that article ultimately, it is decidedly at present at the lowest ebb, none being purchased as I understand with a view to speculation. Perhaps some may be got out in the winter by the way of the dismal swamp canal. Much wheat is withheld from the market in the hope of a better price. It is not understood that the British Government has decided upon the steps with respect to Russian mediation. Of one thing I am sure that if the war continues a year or two longer, there will not be another war rashly entered into with England whilst this present generation lasts.

SEPT. 25. With respect to the prospects of selling flour this winter without a peace it is gloomy indeed. The blockade of the coast of North Carolina has closed the last outlet left for Virginia, and nothing can now get out unless it runs through the British fleet. Although some attempts of that sort will doubtless be made, the greatness of the risk will render freight so high as to reduce the price of flour here to almost nothing.

OCT. 11. I believe that the best mode of disposing of any kind of grain at present is to distil it into whiskey, that liquor, I am informed, being now worth 90 cents £ gallon. Wheat and Flour are allmost worth nothing here at present.

OCT. 29th. Our trade here is assuming a new direction gradually. Many British goods arrive, which doubtless are smuggled

into the country. Their prices I think may be averaged at double what they were before the war. Salt is rising. A sack of Liverpool filled is worth Twelve dollars.

Nov. 20. He [Drew, commission merchant] has been selling the last flour you sent down at \$5.25 ^{per} Bbl. Some shipments have been made of flour from this place to Norfolk within the last few days, with the intention, I presume, of getting it out to sea by some means or other.

Dec. 30. (Has just returned from a visit to his father.) I find the embargo has raised the price of groceries considerably beyond their standard previous to its passage. Sugar is now selling at \$32 ^{per} Cwt. for Brown, and 50 cents ^{per} pound for white by the Barrell. Wheat has fallen to 3rd ^{per} bushel, and flour is almost utterly unsaleable for the present. The two Banks, I am informed, are not willing to loan any more money to the legislature, and that the State's quota must be raised by tax upon the people. Military service, rotting crops, and heavy taxes will put their democracy to the test. Tobacco has not been much influenced by the Embargo, and I shall probably get a tolerable price for mine when it arrives.

1814.

FEB. 5. I do not think it by any means improbable that private correspondence is often examined at present in the post-office, in order to ascertain the opinion entertained with respect to the present political situation of the country. The expectation of a peace from the negotiations about to take place at Gottenburg, as far as I can learn, is gaining ground. It is believed that the administration will be wise enough to accept a peace, if they can obtain one not utterly shameful. But it is apprehended that should a peace ensue, it will be late in the present year before our trade will receive any advantage from it. Flour is excessively dull at present. I now frequently see Col. Macon;* of late he has been much in this place. Wednesday an

* Colonel William Hartwell Macon, of "Mt. Prospect," New Kent county; born March 2d, 1759; died August 24, 1843; married (1) March 2d, 1779, Sarah, daughter of Edward Ambler, of Jamestown; (2) December 13, 1783, Hannah, daughter of Miles Selden; (3) August 14,

express arrived here from New Kent to carry down for him a new wig and two small combs to tuck up the long hair attached to it. During the life of his wife he was in the habit of wearing a cap. I see Major Pryor* frequently; he is now very fat, and still active as military agent. No failures have occurred among the merchants here since I wrote you last; indeed, the apprehension of them has much abated, as the prices of West India produce have settled * * * [torn] not more than 20 ¢ cent. below which * * * were previous to the arrival of the cartel [at Annapolis, with an offer for negotiations].

FEB. 12. All reflecting men seem to think that peace should be made by our administration, but whether the obstinacy and wounded pride of the ruling party may so far insatuate them as to induce a continuance of the war, is difficult to determine. The State of Massachusetts appears to be ripe for a separation from the union, and if the war continues much longer there is much reason to apprehend that New England will adopt a government for itself. The legislature will close its session in a few days; they have borrowed all the money they could, and increased the taxes throughout the state 33 1/3 ¢ cent. Their tax upon Dogs may be the means of saving a good many sheep and hogs.

FEB. 26. The [bank] stock you enquire about, you will per-

1814, Sarah, widow of Benjamin Dabney, and daughter of Rev. Thomas Smith, of Cople parish, Westmoreland county. Colonel Macon was a member of the House of Delegates 1785, 1786, 1787.

*John Pryor, Captain-Lieutenant 1st Continental Artillery, 13th February, 1777; Major Aid-de-Camp to General Alexander, 9th June, 1779, to 14th January, 1783; retired on last-named date. After the war Major Pryor resided in Richmond, and was for a time military agent of the State. Like many retired officers, he was in reduced circumstances, and for a time kept a pleasure resort called Pryor's Garden, situated on the river side near the present Byrd street station. While residing here his wife separated from him, and soon after became the wife of Mons. Fremont, dancing master, and the mother of John C. Fremont. John Bigelow, in a campaign life of Fremont, published in 1856, makes a very pretty story of youth and beauty chained in unbearable union to age and decrepitude; of separation by mutual consent and of a happy second marriage; but the real story, as told by documentary evidence, is of a very different sort.

ceive by the advertisement in the *Enquirer*, will commence being sold on the 14th of March. It will be sold, I am informed, in lots of from five to twenty shares, and the sale continued from day to day until it is all sold. The Bank officers think it will command from \$103 to \$105 $\text{\textcircled{P}}$ share, but Blagrove, one of the Commissioners, expects to get, as I am informed, as much as \$115 $\text{\textcircled{P}}$ share for it. With respect to flour, it has really been so dull that many of the merchants have answered my inquiries relative to the price that it was worth nothing. None of yours has been sold, Drew tells me, for less than $\$5\frac{1}{4}$ $\text{\textcircled{P}}$ Bbl. Some tobacco has been sold here lately as high as thirteen dollars p' Hundred. I suppose the price of that article will keep up until our hopes of a peace are disappointed, which I suppose will be ascertained in the month of June.

MARCH 15. You have doubtless heard some account of an alarm felt among the northern Banks in consequence of the heavy drafts made upon them lately. I allude to the banks as far north as New York. The Manhattan Bank, one of much importance in the City of New York, has actually stopped payment. The drafts that have been felt most heavily have come from Massachusetts, the balance of trade since the blockade of our coast having been greatly in favor of that State. Through them we have obtained almost all our articles of foreign growth; and as we to the west of the Hudson could send them none of our produce, or very little, in return, it became necessary to pay in cash. These payments were made in Bank notes, and these notes are now sent on for the specie deposited in the Banks from whence they were issued. Coin is, of course, becoming scarcer to the South; the Banks are more Cautious in lending money; here they have refused to lend any more than is actually out; and when this new stock is brought into the market, these circumstances must influence its price. Will they not have a tendency also to impair its credit? Our Government is also about to borrow 25 millions of Dollars if they can get it. Many of the Banks have been severely squeezed by them, and if the new loan is obtained from the same sources, bankruptcy must in many instances follow. I know you have foreseen for some time a depreciation of the paper currency of the country.

APRIL 8. Old Virginia [Bank] Stock is at \$126, new stock is

at \$108 or \$109, of the latter I understand there is none in the market, and being principally purchased by persons from the country will perhaps remain uninfluenced by the present unexampled pressure for money. The Banks here have been calling in their debts in consequence the pressure on them, and those persons here who have borrowed from them, even of the best credit in the place, are giving, I am credibly informed, 5 ~~10~~ Cent. P^r month for money to meet their discounts. A very large dividend will be made in July of all the surplusses left at the former divisions on the old stock, in order to place the old stock on a footing with the new, and that prospect keeps up the price of the old stock.

MAY 22d (Staunton). The intelligence from England is not of a pacific nature towards us. No commissioners have been appointed to meet ours. Produce in Richmond has fallen rapidly, especially tobacco, which to me is very unpleasant information for I calculated on getting something for my tobacco, considering the high prices given for the last three months.

JULY 16. I reached this place on Thursday evening last. I found the town in a state of very considerable alarm from the news that a large British reinforcement had reached the Chesapeake. It does not however appear that a large force has arrived here, it is only expected. Some of Wellington's troops have reached Canada. Major Pryor tells me he thinks this place is in great danger, and advises me to move off my furniture. Barber [Governor James Barbour] has convoked some militia generals and they are now holding what they call a council of war. No business of any kind is doing here now. I am glad that I left my wife and children behind, for I do not think it improbable that Richmond will be a pile of ashes before the fall. Col. Macon is to be married in a few weeks to a widow in Gloucester named Dabney. If the negotiations now pending do not terminate in peace I shall abandon this place altogether.

AUG. 2d. I have sent off two of Gregory's boats* loaded with

* In 1800 a canal around the falls of James river from Richmond to Westham was opened, and, with some minor work higher up, the river was rendered navigable to Lynchburg. The boats used were open batteaux, carrying from ten to twelve hogsheads of tobacco. The

the balance of the furniture that it was in my power to pack up, having two boats of Samuel Harding's two days before. Since Harding set out we have had an unusual fresh in James River, which has carried off Mayo's bridge and done immense damage to the country bordering on the river. I hope the boats escaped without injury. I have ordered Fleming to ride roan horse up to Nelson and to bring Lark down, if his back is well enough. My reason for wishing to have him is that if I am ordered into the field he is the only horse I have that will stand fire. If any accident should happen to me I know my Dear Father, that you will take care of my children, allow me to entreat that you will also take care of my good and blameless wife.

AUG. 13. I have preserved the Bills for the articles purchased for you, and the prices are as follows:

2 Barrels White Sugar, 240 lb., @ 34-100,	\$ 81.60
4 lb. Imperial tea @ 19sh., 6d.,	13.00
1 Cask 10dy. nails, 150 lb. } 300 @ 14 .	42.00
1 do. 12dy. — 150 lb. }	
6 Stock locks, 10sh., 6d.,	9.75
2 Casks q',	67
156 lb. 6d. cut nails @ 17cts., and barrel,	
2sh.	26.85
	<u>\$173.87</u>
United States Gazette from Jany., 1813, to	
Jany., 1815,	8.00
	<u>\$181.87</u>

The agent for the Federal Republican has appointed to-day to receive your subscription. Ritchie I shall also pay to-day.

boatmen were negroes, and a fragment of one of their songs is still remembered:

"I gwine down ter town,
I'm gwine down ter town,
I'm gwine down t' Richmond town,
Ter cyar my baccar down."

"Porte Crayon" and Dr. Bagby have written of the boatmen and the up river life.

Drew has since sold 100 Barrels of your flour at 4 dollars ₤ Barrel. Bank stock has sold at auction for the following prices: Old Virginia, \$110; New do., \$102.50; Farmers Bank, \$112. Great distress for money here has occasioned the depreciation, as the Banks, so far from discounting, are curtailing as far as possible. The Virginia Bank will, it is believed, be safe, but if the war continues the Farmers Bank is thought to be in danger of breaking, as an immense number of those to whom it has given credits must be ruined. I am, however, I think, correctly informed that there is not specie enough in the Virginia Bank to take up all its notes, and if an alarm with respect to its credit should produce a run upon it, it will be compelled, for a time at least, to stop the payment of specie. The Banks at New Orleans have some time since stopped paying specie, and their notes have depreciated from 10 to 20 ₤ cent. The far greater part of the specie of the Bank of Virginia is at Lynchburg. The destruction of Richmond at this juncture would produce immense loss to almost the whole of Virginia.

AUG. 20th. The day before yesterday we received information from Norfolk that a large fleet had entered the bay, supposed from the number of transports to have brought seven or eight thousand men. They formed a junction with those already here, and by the last accounts had proceeded up the bay. Their destination is supposed to be Baltimore or Washington, they may have some other object. The price given here for flour for the army is kept a secret by the contractors, I have, therefore, not been able to ascertain what is given for that article. Bacon will sell readily by the quantity at from 15 to 18 cents ₤ lb. All that is brought here sound goes off readily. The town is becoming sickly. I hope a few days will enable me to leave this place, unless I am called upon to perform military duty. At present I see no prospect of my being employed in that manner, the time however, may not be far distant. Under almost any event a part of the Regiment to which I am attached will remain in the town, and unless the whole marches, I do not understand that I am bound to go, belonging to Ambler's staff, whom they wish to keep out of service if possible. They cannot induce him to resign, there is no charge against him that a

Court Martial can proceed upon, and the only resource is to leave him at home.

SEPT. 5. I arrived here on Sunday. I found the town in consternation, most of the inhabitants gone, goods, furniture, &c., remained. We have not heard from the British since they left Washington. Troops are pouring in here every hour, the mass of militia will be very great, from ten to twenty thousand men, no business is transacted here at present. I have been ordered and countermanded several times, my final orders are to move tomorrow morning at sunrise to Bottoms Bridge, where I am to remain with a regiment, perhaps for some time. I have equipped myself as well as I can, having as I am told, to sleep on the ground without a tent, and very little to eat.

SEPT. 13. I wrote to you soon after my arrival here, when I expected to be stationed for some time at Bottom's Bridge. When we arrived at Camp we were ordered back again; to be stationed in Richmond until further orders. My time has been almost incessantly occupied since my return in doing the medical duty of the Regt as we have no hospital, and are obliged to visit the men in their own lodgings and report their situation daily. At present all boats, waggon, &c., are impressed for the public service. The Farmers Bank has stopped the payment of specie altogether. The other Bank continues to pay specie in part. The country people are now very unwilling to take bank notes in payment for anything, and it is really difficult to buy subsistence.

SEPT. 14. I saw ——— here. He informed me that on his way down he found a person who agreed to take his place for \$150. That person has substituted him and I suppose is now discharged. I was going to Camp at Bottoms' Bridge, but on arriving there was ordered back to be stationed here until further orders. The notice for discharging these troops, I understand, arises from the difficulty of supplying them with provisions. The Country is almost in a state of destitution.

SEPT. 22d. As Bank notes have depreciated 10 p. cent. and are likely to fall still more I do not wish to sell any of my property here, at present, as they are the only kind of money to be had. Specie has almost vanished entirely.

SEPT. 28. Bank stock I have enquired for, the Old Virginia

stands at \$105, the new at \$102. The Banks since stopping the payment of specie have ceased curtailing their accounts, and the motive for selling Bank stock, at least the most urgent, ceased with that measure. My stay in Richmond is very uncertain. Ambler is now at Fredericksburg on a Court Martial, when he returns I expect to go with him to Chamberlayne's Brigade near Bottoms' Bridge.

Nov. 9. I arrived here this morning. I found Dr. Adams in Town who told me that he had written to me eight days since, to inform me there was no occasion for my presence in Camp. Colo. Ambler having determined to use the medical staff he found there. Dr. Adams was discharged after a few days service. The Colonel will finish his tour [of duty] which it is expected will last until the first of March, and as members of his staff we will not be called into service until it comes his time to serve again, retaining, as we shall, any present commissions.

Flour I am informed will command \$4.50.*

VIRGINIA MILITIA IN THE REVOLUTION.

(CONTINUED.)

1777. Jan'y 1. Demerit, John, for Carthire to the Lancaster Battalion, £4. 0. 0.

Davis, John, for two Rifles for Capt. Thos. Dillard's Comp'y Min. Men, 11. 0. 0.

Mar. 12. Darden, Capt. John, for pay & Rations for his Comp. Isle of Wight Militia, to 21st Feb'y, 25. 13. 10.

14. Dillingham, Joshua, for 1 Rifle furnished Capt. Abram Penn's Comp., 4. 10. 0.

22. Duffie, Thomas, for 8 days' work on Fort Stephen, 1. 12. 0.

* In 1816 a "boom" period set in in Richmond; credit was easy and speculation was rife. Lands in and about the city and Manchester sold at the most extravagant prices, and several "additions" (not yet built up) were laid out. Speculation and high prices were not confined to real estate alone, but also included produce; flour rose to \$15 and even \$25 a bbl.; tobacco from \$2 or \$5 to \$15, \$25, and even \$30. Of course, a collapse followed and losses were heavy. Mordecai, in *Richmond in Bygone Days*, has a chapter on this period, "Flush Times in Richmond."